

## 48 Hours 851

### Chapter 851: Upcoming Assessment

From the moment Dadatis became Zhang Heng's teacher, the first request made by the old man was for Zhang Heng to not reveal that he was related to Balance Blade.

According to Dadatis, that was how an assassin survived.

Two hundred years ago, a traitor destroyed the Balance Blade's plan to assassinate Octavian. At the same time, the traitor had also exposed all the core members of the organization. All of them were top-tier assassins worldwide, and each possessed extraordinary assassination skills. However, once their identities were exposed, they were surrounded by the government, and the Hounds hunted them down after that. Only a few survived this disaster.

After that, Balance Blade also learned a lesson from it. The core members no longer disclosed their identities to each other. Only the speaker of the Assassin Council and the priest of Kreis knew the identity of all the members. However, the organization did not prevent the members from associating with each other privately. If they found someone trustworthy, they were free to disclose their identities to each other.

"You have already met the priest, and now the speaker of the Assassin Council is my old friend. He is known as Faceless. The two of them know your true identity. Other than them, one more person knew who you are. Her nickname is Hyacinth."

"Hyacinth, who is he?" Zhang Heng asked.

"You should be asking who she is. You haven't passed the test and are not officially one of us yet, so I can't tell you too much about her." Dadatis gave a weird expression when he mentioned Hyacinth. He looked warm and wary but mixed with a hint of guilt. "We don't have much contact, but she went to see you not long ago. That was because I needed more people to encourage you to join Balance Blade. Hyacinth has a huge social network in the organization. And she has at least three votes in her hand from her admirers and herself."

"Huh?"

"Anyway, you don't have to care about her too much. She doesn't like me, and she probably won't like you too. But rest assured that she will not sell your identity," Dadatis said. "Except for the three people I mentioned above, no one else in the organization knows your identity. The only information I have released about you is your potential and that you are a non-believer, especially your attitude toward the Balance Blade. I can't and should not hide it."

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Although it had been a while since Dadatis left the city of Rome, Zhang Heng hadn't forgotten Dadatis's instructions. Cornu, on the second floor of the tavern, had unexpectedly elected to stand by his side. And Zhang Heng also guessed Cornu most likely came from the Balance Blade as well. When Cornu tried to test Zhang Heng with the Balance Blade's doctrine, Zhang Heng denied his knowledge immediately.

This was mainly because Zhang Heng did not intend to get too involved with the Balance Blade, especially when the two rivals, the Balance Blade and the Hounds, were about to go to war. For Zhang Heng, he did not intend to intervene in this war that had nothing to do with him. Dadatis had been sent to a place far away from Rome, which also meant Zhang Heng had no one he cared about in the Balance Blade.

Hence, he didn't intend to discover Cornu's true identity. He did not even ask the priestess to verify him. That was why, a week later, Cornu and others concluded that Zhang Heng was not from the Balance Blade. In the past, the members of the Balance Blade were required to have good faith and a sense of belonging to the organization. They did not expect that someone got to join their organization without knowing their doctrine and belief well.

While the fight between the Balance Blade and the Hound was ongoing, another matter concerned Zhang Heng.

It had almost been two months since he arrived in the southeast city. In other words, the next round of assessment was just around the corner.

Zhang Heng had been preparing to make sure that he could pass an entire week's assessment. The result of this assessment would determine whether he could return to Commodus's side.

Although a lot of work was still needed to grow the new forces he formed in the southeast urban area, Zhang Heng had helped them clear their most significant obstacle that could hinder growth. He believed that Soap, Marcus, and others should be able to cope with the situation. That would mean he could withdraw from it and start investigating the whereabouts of Altrus.

So in this assessment, Zhang Heng needed to pass with flying colors.

The person responsible for assessing the work of the patrol team was a young nobleman in the Senate named Fabino. Known for his integrity and selflessness, he was unanimously elected as the assessor.

Firstly, everyone felt that he was the only one who could do this job since he was not afraid of offending anyone. Secondly, sending him away could prevent him from finding faults in the Senate.

Half a month ago, Fabino began assessing the patrol team's work in various neighborhoods. He had basically traveled around Rome to assess different places, leaving only the southeast area as the last stop.

The southeast city had been put at the bottom of his list because Fabino felt that there was nothing worth assessing over there. Everyone in Rome knew that southeast city was a hell hole. The place was filled with criminals and villains, and most would avoid the place at all costs. However, when Fabino became an assessor, he had heard many rumors about the place, but he did not know how bad it was. Hence, he only brought two guards to inspect the place.

As a result, they were robbed before they could reach the door of the patrol station. The two guards were no match to the gangsters over there. Not only did Fabino lose all his valuables, but he even received two punches in his stomach. After that, the patrol team also failed to help him to catch the criminals and retrieve his personal belongings.

It was no surprise that Fabino gave the lowest scores to the patrol team in the southeast city again and again. In all fairness, he wasn't trying to avenge himself. Whenever Fabino gave the lowest score to the place, he felt that he had committed a misdemeanor. After he saw the condition of the place, he wished that he could give them an even lower score.

"The place is doomed and hopeless. And the Senate has no intention to do anything about it. I bet someone there must have accepted bribes. That's why they turned a blind eye to this situation," Fabino complained to his friend. "I really don't want to go to that hell hole anymore."

Despite saying that, the responsible Fabino would go there to pollute his eyes every two months. And he had learned his lesson well; whenever he came here to inspect the place, he would bring a group of armed guards with him in addition to the two patrol team members that were assigned to him. This was to ensure that the previous tragedy would not happen again.

So early that morning, Fabino appeared on the streets of the southeast city with his armed guards.

### **Chapter 852: Do You Want To Take A Look?**

The streets of the southeast city still looked as bad as ever.

The road was muddy and filthy, mixed with urine and human feces. The stench was unbearable, where children with dirty clothes ran around barefooted. Their fathers worked in an even harsher environment. After their mothers finished their housework, they would stand at the side of the street to see if they could find any potential customers that might look for their service.

Fabino quickly took out the handkerchief he had prepared earlier to cover his mouth and nose to avoid being overwhelmed by the smell. The law actually prohibited the residents from pouring their waste products on the street, but it seemed the law did not apply here.

After that, Fabino remembered that a deadly plague was unleashed unto this place about five or six years ago, taking away with it a third of the lives here. Initially, Fabino thought that there would be fewer people here. At that time, this place did look a bit lifeless. However, he did not expect an influx of new immigrants and the birth of a batch of newborns. It became even livelier than before.

Fabino had to admit that the life force in this place was indeed extremely tough.

But when he cast his gaze on the distant street, his mood took a worse turn.

Because that was the place where he was robbed and beaten up when he visited the southeast city for the first time. Fabino was the only son in the family, and he was well protected. Ever since he was a kid, no one had scolded him, let alone getting beaten up. During that time, he was being pinned to the ground and beaten up by the thugs. In a panic, he seemed to have swallowed a few mouthfuls of mud. It took Fabino half a year to convince himself that he should just ignore whatever that was contained in the mouthful of earth that he ate.

However, every time when he visited this place, the traumatic experience would still come back to haunt him. Fortunately, whenever he felt uncomfortable, he could regain his lost sense of security by turning around and looking at the guard behind him.

However, when he turned his head around, the sense of security that he just gained was lost again.

“What’s going on?!” Fabino’s expression changed drastically, “Has the public security in the southeast city deteriorated so badly? The robbers here have just evolved into a group of armed soldiers! All this just to rob me?!”

He saw a group of people in armor, armed to their teeth with weapons in their hands, appearing from the other side of the street, steadily approaching Fabino.

After Fabino expressed his concerns, the guards around him became nervous too. Immediately, they drew their weapons as if they were going to fight an epic war. Since they were chosen to become the guards of the Fabino family, they were definitely not of the mediocre breed. Many among them had joined the army before, which was precisely why they could see that their enemies were hard to deal with.

Not only were they equipped with high-quality weapons and armor, but they also wore a very unusual temperament. Clearly, they were the kind of people that had bathed in blood before. Although they had almost the same number of people on both sides, it was still unclear if they could win the fight.

The captain of the guard was very conscientious. He lowered his voice and said to the two guards from the patrol team, “You two will take Sir Fabino to a safe place first. We will stop the enemies.”

So Fabino, in huge shock, caught between the two guards, was about to flee for his life. He had even thought about filing a complaint against this place to the Senate before going home. He wanted to tell everyone that the large and small forces in the southeast area were ready to rebel.

One of the men from the opposite armed forces stepped out and said respectfully, “Master Fabino, where are you going?”

“A... Aris?” Fabino was stunned and finally recognized the person.

Earlier, when the sunlight shone on the armor, it blinded his eyes, and he could not see what they looked like. He had never thought that the armed forces in front of him were the patrol team. When they met Aris and his patrol members for the first time, they looked poor. They did not have proper equipment nor the money to improve their team’s condition. They looked more like a group of beggars. Now they looked like elite armored guards. This was something he could never have imagined.

It had only been two months. The man who was helpless about the situation in the southeast city had now returned to his prime. What surprised Fabino was that the other patrol members had also changed a lot. No longer consumed by fear, they were now filled with confidence. And Fabino started to feel that he could now rely on them.

Fabino shook his head and quickly drove this absurd idea out of his head.

‘No! No! No! This is an illusion! It must be an illusion!’

He was not looking down on them. Since he was the assessor, he knew the difficulties Aris and the other patrol members were facing. Fabino knew that he could not blame Aris for it. There was no one who could solve the problems here. The southeast city had been in chaos for a very long time, and several emperors had failed to bring changes to this place. It was unrealistic to hope that Aris could save it.

However, he could not let his emotions overtake the job. Fabino still had to give them a score according to the actual situation here. As for allocating funds and manpower to the patrol, that was something out of his control tool.

Fabino was acting in a rather awkward way now. After he saw that the armed guards were his allies, he decided not to run anymore. He could not help but ask, "What the hell are you doing? Where did you steal all these armors? Hurry and return them to their owners! I know that you want to score well in this assessment, but that's not the right way to do it."

"Master Fabino, you have misunderstood us. This is our armor," Zhang Heng stepped out of the crowd and said.

"Oh, you are the gladiator who came to help the patrol team... I have seen your performance. You are really amazing." Fabino did not hesitate to praise Zhang Heng. "...especially when you dealt with that crazy bison. You defeated it with only a rope! You are the best gladiator I have ever seen. But have you offended someone? Why were you assigned here for your first mission?"

"No, I come here voluntarily after I learned about the situation in the southeast city from Clint. And I want to do something about it," Zhang Heng said.

"What do you want to do for this place? Burn it to the ground?" asked Fabino. "Only fire can purify the evil of this place."

"No, I want to bring order back."

"Hahaha... Then I want to build a pyramid for myself," Fabino smiled halfway, but he quickly put it away and asked again, "wait, are you serious?"

"Yes, I am." Zhang Heng took a wooden box out of his arms and handed it to Fabino.

The latter's face sank, and he waved his hand, "No, no, I'm different from the other people in the Senate. Didn't Aris tell you? I won't take the bribe. Since this is your first run, I will hold you responsible. But if you dare to bribe me next time, I will definitely ask someone to arrest you."

"No, you have misunderstood me. This is not bribery. I'm returning your belongings," Zhang Heng said.

"Huh?" Fabino raised his eyebrows and took the wooden box doubtfully. After opening it, he was taken aback. It was the engagement ring he had lost six years ago, as well as some miscellaneous items. All the items he had lost in the robbery were now back in his life.

"In addition, we also caught the group of robbers who robbed you, but unfortunately, three of them have died, but the mastermind is locked up in the prison of the patrol station." Zhang Heng added, "Do you want to see him?"

### **Chapter 853: Facing The Nightmare**

When he heard the last sentence that Zhang Heng uttered out, Fabino wondered if he had gone to the wrong neighborhood. Was this still the southeast city that he had been to six years ago? Was it still the chaotic land that was filled with criminals and villains without law and order?

According to Fabino's impression of this place, criminal activities were supposed to be rife on the streets of the southeast city all the time, and the patrol team only managed to crack a few of the cases. Even for homicides... they were usually left unsettled. As for the robbery that happened six years ago, Fabino was the only person that provided useful information to the patrol team. At that time, Fabino was furious. He could still remember that he was swearing most of the time rather than describing what happened. In other words, catching the robbers was close to impossible.

If it weren't for the wooden box in his hand, Fabino would've probably patted Zhang Heng's shoulder, laughed, and told him that he told a good joke. It would not help with the assessment, but Fabino was now looking at the box. He was pretty sure that the thing inside was the ring that he lost six years ago. And for this reason, he almost messed his marriage.

Afterward, he spent a lot of effort attempting to retrieve it. Of course, he did not rely on the useless patrol team. Instead, he mobilized the family guards, and he sought help from the Vigiles. In total, he dispatched almost two hundred people to search for his ring, enough to be considered a small army. Unfortunately, the search yielded no result.

This was proof that neither the Vigiles nor his family guards could carry out any investigation at this place. They did not get any help during their investigation. This place had its own set of operating rules, and the people here were obviously very xenophobic. Otherwise, the patrol team would not have lived in such a state for so many years.

No matter how upset Fabino was, he could only admit that he had bad luck. Considering the woman he married came from a rather prominent background, he had to spend a lot of time appeasing his future wife. And at one point, he became the laughing stock of the upper society.

Fabino did not expect that one day he would be able to retrieve the lost engagement ring. He closed the wooden box in his hand and took a deep breath, "Of course, I have been looking forward to this reunion for a long time."

Fabino followed Zhang Heng and others to the patrol station.

At this time, the assessor found out that the patrol had actually moved from the previous dangerous building without an owner to a new house that had just been built. Not only was the building larger, but it also appeared studier too. But considering the special circumstance of the southeast city, the patrol team's family members still lived with them. It could ensure that they were always safe.

Aris' daughter Viya was patrolling outside her new home, but she was not carrying a slingshot this time. It had been replaced by bow and arrow. The short bow on her back was given to her by Zhang Heng. Zhang Heng had also taught her archery. After his meeting with Lockheed, the tense situation had now eased. Strictly speaking, Viya was not patrolling; she was just practicing archery at the front entrance of the new building.

"Master Fabino," Viya remarked politely when she saw the assessor from a distance. And she quickly put away her bow and arrows.

"Huh? Are you Viya? Is there something wrong with my memory? You seem to have something extra compared to two months ago." Fabino knew about Aris's daughter. She had always been rude whenever

they met. She would dress like a boy, hiding at the patrol station's corner, ambushing strangers that walked in. After that, she would yell and threaten to blind their eyes with her slingshot.

This was, of course, not a good thing for people who came to the patrol station to report crimes. Fortunately, Fabino realized that no sane person in this place would come to the patrol station to report crimes. Hence, Fabino did not have a bad impression towards Viya, who was always ready to ambush someone.

He noticed that Viya was still alive and well, but whenever she looked at Zhang Heng, her eyes would always show a touch of admiration. Fabino finally knew what the extra thing that he found on Viya's body was. It seemed like someone finally managed to tame the wild monkey.

Fabino certainly knew who brought the changes to the patrol team. Aris had been the captain of the southeast city patrol team for a long time. He knew exactly what he was capable of. The possibility of catching the person who robbed him six years ago and retrieving the engagement ring was not something he could pull off.

So there was no doubt that the current changes in the patrol team were brought by the oriental man next to him. Fabino found that he became more and more interested in the gladiatorial champion of the Flavian Amphitheatre. Still, Fabino had to meet an old friend before getting to know Zhang Heng more.

"Is he being locked here?" Fabino followed Zhang Heng into the backyard of the patrol station. There was a row of bamboo poles for drying clothes. The house behind the bamboo poles was originally Copper Arm's and his men's torture room. After the patrol team took over the place, they modified it into a simple prison.

"Yes." Zhang Heng pushed open the door of one of the cells.

The room was a little dim, and six years had passed since the incident, but Fabino still recognized the man in the room at a glance, the man who had brutally robbed and beat him on the street six years ago.

It was this bastard who forced him to open up his hand and snatched his ring. He was undergoing a lot of pain at that time. Before the man left, he landed two punches on his stomach. The physical pain was nothing, but the feeling of humiliation and helplessness had scarred Fabino's life.

And now, he was finally standing in front of his nightmare again, like Batman walking into the bat cave for the first time, facing his fear, and crushing it fiercely.

"Your name is Sotheby, right? Do you still remember me, bastard?" Fabino stepped forward two steps and sneered.

The man named Sotheby curled up in the corner like a frightened old dog. He then raised his head when he heard someone calling out his name. However, he put on a blank look when he saw Fabino.

Fabino frowned and asked Zhang Heng behind him, "Did you torture him?"

"No, he was already in this state when we found him. In a gang fight about two years ago, someone hurt both his legs. He was not allowed to stay in the gang anymore, and he couldn't find a job. His wife and children left him after that, so he had to live on the streets, making a living by picking up leftovers. But you know, there are not many leftovers in this kind of place," Zhang Heng said lightly.

“How could this be?” Fabino was a little lost for a while. He had imagined how to deal with him countless times when he found him in the future and washed away the humiliation he suffered in the past. However, when he saw him in this state, he felt that he hit a cotton ball after he clenched his fist.

#### **Chapter 854: Belated Justice**

Fabino anticipated his second meeting with Sotheby to be dramatic.

Sotheby and his men should still be thinking about robbery. Fabino had also imagined that they would be captured by the law enforcement officers when about to rob someone. It would be better if he was the one to lead the law enforcement officers. If that was not the case, he wanted to wait for the day where Sotheby was captured. He would question him in a deep voice to see if he still remembered him.

Sotheby should feel a little confused at first, and when he remembered who Fabino was, he would be terrified of him, worried that the other party would use his power to make him pay for what he did to him. After that, Fabino would walk up to Sotheby and stand face-to-face, allowing Sotheby to experience the fear and humiliation he had experienced that day.

This was the classic example of an “eye for an eye.”

However, when Fabino looked into Sotheby’s eyes, he realized that whatever he had imagined was something that he would never do. Brutus’ men would never abuse their power and bring harm to the weak. This was the difference between Sotheby and him.

It was also the difference between a good person and a bad person. Besides, Fabino knew that it was pointless to do something like that. Sotheby was already living a miserable life. No matter what he did, bringing him any further shame would be impossible. And Sotheby could not even recognize him anymore. So when Fabino walked out of the cell, he transformed into Aunt Xianglin and kept on repeating how this happened to him.

And Zhang Heng, beside him, also had to speak up, “I don’t know what you are thinking right now, but his situation is still quite common around here.”

“Quite common?” Fabino repeated Zhang Heng’s words blankly.

“Yes, this place has a shortage of everything of everything, but not young people who want to improve themselves and their lives. As long as you have the money, you can continue recruiting to expand your territory. Everyone in this neighborhood has heard of the legend of Lockheed. But for so many years, there is only one Lockheed in the southeastern city. Most of them end up like Sotheby over there. They firmly believe that they would become the next Lockheed. So, they actively participate in all the gang fights. They are, however, considered cannon fodder by their leader, and when they can no longer work for the gang, their gang will abandon them and recruit new and younger people at lower prices. As I said, this place is short of everything, but there is no shortage of young people who want to become more powerful.”

Zhang Heng paused and continued, “When you were robbed, Sotheby had already robbed over sixty or seventy people on the street and had participated in no less than ten gang conflicts. It was only a matter of time before he became like this.”

“But, I haven’t made that bastard feel the fear and humiliation I felt,” Fabino complained, dissatisfied.



“Sorry, what did you say?” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

“Forget it, forget it.” Fabino waved his hand in a disappointed manner. He was not stupid, but he had been struggling with this matter for a long time, and he could not snap out of it. Now he finally understood the message that Zhang Heng delivered to him. He and Sotheby were born in a completely different world. Sotheby was born in a world full of crime and sin.

Sotheby had seen and done a lot of horrible things. After he robbed a nobleman, he was not worried that the nobleman would come back and seek revenge. This was why Sotheby forgot about him completely when he met him again.

To Fabino, losing the engagement ring and being beaten up was the most traumatizing part of his life. But if they were to exchange positions, where Sotheby was the one who was beaten and robbed by Fabino, the most he would do was curse at Fabino and forget about it after that.

He had more important things to worry about, such as how to fill up his stomach, please his boss, and how to live to see tomorrow.

“Damn! Why did I hold the grudge for so long?” Fabino kicked a small stone on the ground. Instead of saying that he was annoyed by the fact that Sotheby had changed so much, it would be better to say he is unhappy with his immaturity.

The revenge plans that he came up with were nothing more than a joke.

Fabino raised his head again after venting, and he looked at Zhang Heng again, “Anyway, thank you for helping me retrieve my engagement ring, especially considering that this matter happened so long ago. It must have taken you a great deal of effort to do something like this.”

“That’s not true,” Zhang Heng said truthfully.

As Fabino said, the incident happened six years ago. Zhang Heng would have to spend a long time catching the person behind it if he went through routine investigation procedures. However, with the cooperation of the Jewish gang, getting back the ring and finding the assailant wasn’t too troublesome. The three major forces in the southeast city now had common interests with Zhang Heng, and they needed to help him get back to Commodus and deal with the senator, Diwoblyat, as soon as possible.

Technically speaking, Zhang Heng wasn’t the only one that had worked hard to make sure the place could pass the assessment. The entire southeast city now worked with him.

“Personally, I am very grateful for this, and I have decided to invite you to my house for dinner one day afterward. To be honest, some of my younger sisters and an aunt are very interested in you, but...” After expressing his gratitude, Fabino’s expression became solemn again. “You should have heard some rumors about me. You know what kind of person I am. I will not let personal relationships affect my work. Since the Senate chooses me as the assessor, I shall perform the assessor’s duties faithfully. I will give you the appropriate score based on what I see here.”

“Of course, it is our job to solve the case and catch the criminals.” Zhang Heng nodded and said, “The patrol team should be mostly responsible for the justice that came six years late.”

“You don’t have to be so humble,” Fabino waved his hand. “I still know the general situation here. It is great that you helped me find the ring. With or without personal feelings, I would still give you an extra point here. If you are ready, let’s start.”

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After receiving Zhang Heng’s order, Aris gathered the patrol team members in the open space outside the building.

Fabino walked in front of them, carefully inspecting their weapons and armors that dazzled him earlier. He then nodded and said, “The appearance and equipment maintenance are all done well. No, I should be saying they are almost perfect. I think I can give you full marks for this section. That’s right. Now they look like Imperial Guards. Before that, they looked like a beggar.”

The veteran patrol members such as Aris and others almost cried when they heard the compliment. It was just a simple compliment. Yet, they had not heard anyone complimented them ever since they were transferred here.

Although Fabino knew about the situation here, he did not criticize them too much whenever he came and inspected them last time. However, the look of contempt on him had deeply hurt their self-esteem. They were so used to being at the bottom and getting the lowest score to the point that they had almost forgotten what it felt like to be praised.

Afterward, Aris showed the training results to Fabino. Although Fabino was not that proficient in martial arts, he was still quite observant. He saw that the patrol team’s combat technique had improved a lot. Fabino was very surprised. He thought that they did not know how to fight. If it was last time, they might even lose to the kids on the street.

### **Chapter 855: The Lucky Oriental Man**

Although Fabino witnessed how much the equipment and morale of the patrol team had changed, he still found it difficult to believe that the security situation in the southeast city had improved.

After that, Fabino went on the street with Zhang Heng and the patrol team. He saw all the passers-by, whether men or women, young or old, stopping what they were doing and greeting them in a different accent.

When an old fishmonger stopped in front of Fabino and gave him an expressionless greeting, he was instantly weirded out.

“Well, what the hell is going on? Are they trying to lower our guard so they can secretly assassinate us afterward?”

“No. Out of politeness, they just want to say hello,” Zhang Heng said.

“This is weird,” Fabino touched his chin. “If I remember correctly, the people here have a bad attitude towards outsiders; the people here feeling that they had come to take advantage of them. Although in reality, it is this city that has taken advantage of them, I believe they are more likely to spit at us rather than say hello.”

“It won’t be easy for them to change their old habits, but at least they are trying to make a change. Anyway, saying hello is a good start, isn’t it?”

“Hmm... I think we will know the answer to this question soon.” Fabino seemed noncommittal.

Fabino had an instinctive suspicion of everything in the southeast city. He had always felt that what he saw now only an illusion, but he also firmly believed that he would find out the truth as long as he paid enough attention. He did not know how Zhang Heng managed to make the southeast city natives standing before him cooperate with him and together, creating a harmonious scene. However, the southeast city was a vast place. Fabino did not believe that Zhang Heng could take care of the entire city.

After they spent half a day walking on the street, Fabino was in a state of great shock. Not only did he fail to find any evidence that Zhang Heng had forced the residents to work with him, but he actually found signs that the security in the southeast city was indeed improving.

Although this place was still poor and dirty, the criminal activities on the street had greatly reduced, and some order had been restored. Wherever the patrol team went, Fabino could see that criminals were actually afraid of them.

And from the records handed to him by Aris, it was apparent that the cases solved by the patrol and the criminals they arrested had dramatically increased. This exceeded a zero-to-one improvement, where the number of criminal cases solved by the patrol team had topped all the other regions of Rome. However, considering the unique environment here in the southeast city, the number of criminals caught by the patrol team was just the tip of the iceberg that this place was.

Including Zhang Heng, only thirteen people were in the patrol team. Ironically, among all the other patrol teams from other regions, their team had the fewest members, but they were responsible for the largest and most complicated neighborhoods. Even a strict assessor like Fabino could not find why he should not give Zhang Heng and the others a high score for what they had done for this place.

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The changes that the patrol team brought to this place were rather noticeable. Anyone with a pair of eyes could see that it all began with the arrival of the former gladiator champion named Zhang Heng.

Early the following day, Fabino’s assessment report was sent to Commodus. After the young emperor read it, he put down the report and asked Clint beside him. “What do you think?”

Although Commodus tried his best to maintain a stern look, the excitement in his tone revealed his current thoughts.

Clint bowed, “It seems our gladiator champion is not only good at fighting, but he has also proven that he can be helpful to you. Your Majesty, I think you can consider recruiting him to lighten up your burden. Apart from that, your Majesty, this also proves that you are very good at judging a person.”

“I knew it!” Commodus slapped the table. “I knew he was the one I was looking for!”

A flash of jealousy appeared in Clint’s eyes, but he hid it well. When Commodus looked at him again, Clint showed a touch of relief, as if happy that he had found someone capable of working with him.

“The security problem in the southeast city has bothered the emperors for a long time. Even my father could not solve it, but he did what all the predecessors could not do, and it only took him two months to achieve something so great. He did not ask for funding and more manpower from us!” Commodus gushed in excitement.

“Yes, single-handed, courageous and strategic, very rare indeed.”

Clint praised Zhang Heng without the slightest hesitation.

“Don’t over compliment him.” Kang Maode smiled when he heard Clint praising Zhang Heng. “About being single-handed... You are the one that spread the news about a thousand Imperial Guards are going to station in the southeast city, right? Without this news, I don’t think he can deal with the old and powerful gang leaders over there. And I heard that you had participated a lot in this plan, but you didn’t mention a word about it.”

“This is probably what I like most about you, Clint,” The young emperor patted the advisor on the shoulder. “Many are blinded by power. They were once good people before they tasted power and wanted to do something for the people. But gradually, their minds became corrupted. They wanted more and more power until their hearts were completely occupied by jealousy. I have seen many people like that around my father, but I can be sure that you are not such. The empire is fortunate to have an upright and humble person like you.”

“Your Majesty, your compliments are making me nervous. I am just fulfilling the vow I made when we first met. I wanted to be your eyes, to help you uncover more truths.”

“Yeah, you are my eyes, and Altrus is my hand. And Zhang Heng, let me see what I can get out of him!” Commodus rubbed his hands in glee while he spoke. “Bring him to me.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Clint bowed, turned, and exited Commodus’s study room.

When he came to the hallway, the smile on his face disappeared. Although Zhang Heng was now his political ally, Clint still felt uncomfortable when he heard Commodus praise a person like that. He knew the emperor all too well. Earlier, Zhang Heng had proposed to let him participate in the public security restoration plan of the southeast city, and he was even willing to let him lead the plan. Although Clint agreed to it, he did not adopt Zhang Heng’s original plan. Instead, he withdrew. The only thing that he did was spread the news in the Senate.

He believed that it would work on Commodus, and at the same time, maintain his humble and non-power-hungry image in front of the emperor. Clint knew very well that Zhang Heng was the key to help him stabilize his position at Commodus’s side. And that was the truth.

But compared to what Zhang Heng got from this plan, Clint was still considered a side character. But now, he could not be bothered by it anymore. The competition between him and Altrus had almost reached its climax. And Commodus obviously favored Altrus more. Bringing Zhang Heng to Commodus’s side might not help him eliminate Altrus, but he could at least distract Commodus and give him more time to prepare for it.

“Damn it, what a lucky Oriental man,” Clint muttered in a low voice and left the palace.

**Chapter 856: Clint’s Whisper**

Zhang Heng did not expect that Commodus would come to him so soon. Logically speaking, it would take at least two days for the report to reach the emperor after it was delivered. Meanwhile, Zhang Heng took a break. He brought the slave girl to wander around Rome.

They first went to Perfume Street.

The slave girl was a little curious. She saw Zhang Heng opening a bottle of perfume on the shelf and put it back after sniffing it. "Why did you put it back? Don't you like it?" the slave girl blinked her eyes and asked.

"Oh, no. I just needed a little whiff," he said, picking up a bottle and paying for it. He then tossed the bottle of perfume to the slave girl. "I'll give it to you."

"Really?" The slave girl took the perfume joyfully. While Zhang Heng was not paying attention to her, she opened it and applied the perfume to her hair.

Next, the two walked out of the perfume shop. They went to Matius Square for a quick walk before heading to the Portico of Octavia. Located at a good distance from the city center, there were no markets or insulae in this area. Instead, the place was covered by large areas of green grass, temples, and sculptures. It was an excellent location for leisure and travel.

The monumental portico surrounded the verdant atrium. In the center of it was the temple of King Jupiter and Queen Juno. The frescoes and stucco portraits at the portico told ancient myths and legendary tales related to them. From afar, they could also see Alexander's bronze statue. Travelers and believers that crossed the portico and stopped in front of the statues could feel the solemnness and tranquility of the place.

The slave girl found a spot on the grass and sat down. She then took out the lunch that she prepared earlier and chatted with Zhang Heng. When the slave girl worked in the Victor Arena, she had never thought about the meaning of happiness. But at this moment, she felt that she could reach out and grasp it.

"Are things going well with the patrol team?" the slave girl asked while taking a bite of the bread.

"Well, although there have been some hiccups, everything did go according to my plan," Zhang Heng said. "You can perhaps say that it is going way smoother than I thought."

"So, are you going to work for the emperor next?"

"That would be the case if there are no more hiccups to my plan," Zhang Heng nodded.

"That's great! You can expose Clint's true nature to the emperor then."

The slave girl was still thinking about Clint, the two-faced villain.

Zhang Heng laughed when he heard what she said. "It's not that simple. It doesn't mean the emperor will believe me."

"I believe you. Fully," the slave girl said with conviction. "You are more credible than Clint. No, I shouldn't compare you to him because he isn't worthy of that."

“That’s because you have lived with me for a long time.” Zhang Heng shook his head and said, “You don’t have to worry about me. I am not afraid of Clint. I’m not his target. In the future, we will even have more opportunities to work together.”

The slave girl had a lot of questions after she heard Zhang Heng’s explanation. She then pursed her lips and was about to say something, but she suddenly saw Clint. He was walking towards her with a few guards. The slave girl was taken aback, thinking that Clint must be dabbling with witchcraft. She assumed that he had heard everything that she had just said about him and was now about to arrest her. Hence she hurriedly ran and hid behind Zhang Heng.

“It seems like you get to relax today. It is truly enviable, but I am afraid you will now have to say goodbye to a day like this,” Clint said to Zhang Heng with a smile.

“Hmm?”

“His Majesty, the Emperor is delighted with your performance in the southeast city. So, he asked me to take you to the palace to meet him. Finding you was rather difficult. I went to your residence, and I saw no one. After that, I went to the patrol station, and they told me that you were on an outing. So, I thought you might be here. It seems I’m in luck. Come with me. Don’t make the emperor wait for you,” Clint said.

Zhang Heng stood up from the grass and said to the slave girl behind him, “That’s it. I think we have to end the day here. You can head home first.”

“Okay. Watch out for yourself,” the slave girl whispered into Zhang Heng’s ears, stealing a glance at Clint.

After that, Zhang Heng entered a carriage with Clint, and they went on their way to the palace. But before they could enter, Clint asked the coachman to park the carriage in a place where no one would notice.

Clint then cleared his throat and said, “I know you’ve heard some rumors...”

“What rumors?” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

“For example, only the unlucky ones who have offended the higher-ups or those without proper background would be sent to the patrol station in the southeast city. It is like a place you get sent to if you’re exiled from Rome..”

“Oh, I...”

Before Zhang Heng could speak his mind, Clint interrupted him.

“This is true. Although this statement is inaccurate, it is not far off. The problem in the southeast city has been around for a long time. Honestly, neither the emperor nor I expected anyone to solve the trouble there.”

“Neither did I. I reached an agreement with the major forces there, hoping to reduce crime,” Zhang Heng said.

“You are too modest. In short, I wanted to send you to the Tiber River’s north bank because it has the best security in Rome. You can easily complete the tasks assigned by the Emperor. But as you know, I was forced to make a move when we were talking halfway that day. I had something urgent to deal with. So I had to leave Pannonax in charge of this. A few days later, I got shocked when I learned you were assigned to the southeast.”

Clint’s face showed a touch of guilt, “Forgive me. I didn’t look for you after that because I didn’t know how to face you. I’m trying to say that the Emperor had put me in charge of this matter because he trusts me. However, you were assigned to the southeast area in the end. Undoubtedly, I share a great deal of responsibility when it comes to this. For the next few days, I did not stay idle. I did something for you instead.

“Is that so?”

“Yes, I investigated Pannonax, and guess what?”

“How did it go?”

Clint lowered his voice and moved closer to Zhang Heng’s ear. “I found out that he works for Altrus. He hides it well. They only communicate via correspondence, and the letters are burned once read. So, my people tried their best, intercepting a letter that Pannonax could not send out in time. Read it.”

Clint stuffed a papyrus with the wall of words on it into Zhang Heng’s hand. He also handed Zhang Heng a letter written by Pannonax to his family. It allowed Zhang Heng to compare the handwriting. He then asked with concern, “If I may I ask, any grudges between you and Altrus? I don’t know why he’s targeting you.”

“I don’t have a clue,” Zhang Heng said, “I heard that Altrus is a very mysterious person. No one has really seen him before. I don’t even know what he looks like. How can I offend him?”

“That’s what I thought,” Clint nodded, “Just be careful. Although we all serve the emperor, some would inevitably brew malicious thoughts. You should always pay attention to your safety. I heard that some who work for Altrus hide in the shadows, supposedly doing his dirty work. If you encounter any trouble in the future, you can come to me. I am hoping I can compensate for what I’ve done to you.”

### **Chapter 857: Goodbye Commodus**

Regardless of the tone or the expression on his face, Clint appeared very sincere. And Zhang Heng had two in his hand as evidence. If another person talked to Clint, that person might trust 70% of what he said, even if they couldn’t believe him entirely. Unfortunately, the person sitting in the carriage was Zhang Heng.

When Clint showed up for the first time, Zhang Heng had already known what his plan was. And from what Clint said just now, Zhang Heng now confirmed that Clint and Altrus were the emperor’s right and left hands. Both his most important consultants, their relationship was not as harmonious as it seemed on the surface. Otherwise, even if they had common interests, Clint might not be willing to help Zhang Heng overcome his difficulties.

As of now, Clint’s current intention was very obvious to Zhang Heng. He hoped that Zhang Heng could work with him to deal with Altrus.

In all fairness, Clint did come up with a solid plan. Not only did he attempt to get rid of Zhang Heng's suspicion towards him via the two letters, but he even directed the attention to his political enemy, Altrus. At the same time, he managed to set up a trap for Zhang Heng.

The smile on his face did not last long, though, and his expressions became frozen in the next moment.

It was because he saw Zhang Heng taking out two flint stones from his pocket before slowly lighting the two papyrus.

"Uh, what are you doing?"

"Let the past be the past. There is an old saying in my country. One should solve the conflict but not worsen it. I think it makes perfect sense here," Zhang Heng said lightly.

Clint's goals overlapped Zhang Heng's goals in a sense, which was why Zhang Heng had told the slave girl he might work with Clint in the future. However, this did not mean that Zhang Heng would pick a side so soon. It was no doubt that Clint carried sinister intent when he handed the letters to Zhang Heng.

If Zhang Heng could not hold back and handed the two letters to Commodus, it would mean that a war between him and Altrus would spark off immediately. Although Commodus had a good impression of him and contributed a lot to the stability in the southeast city, Zhang Heng believed that Commodus would still take Altrus' side, the latter of whom he had worked side-by-side with for a long time. Besides, the political resources Altrus possessed would never allow him to be destroyed by two mere letters. If this matter continued, the person who would suffer the most, in the end, would be Zhang Heng.

Besides, if the first thing Zhang Heng did after entering the palace was to report to his colleague, this would undoubtedly give Commodus the impression that he was the disagreeable kind. It did not matter whether the matter was fabricated. As an advisor of Commodus, his political achievements and capability were not as crucial as Commodus's attitude towards him.

And the emperor's attitude towards a person could change anytime. Maybe he liked you a lot when he first met you, but the next second, something insignificant could have him treat you differently. Such a thing was ubiquitous in history. Few people that the emperor valued ended up well.

When Commodus's impression of Zhang Heng deteriorated, Clint would step forward to say a few good things about Zhang Heng. Then, perhaps, Zhang Heng could continue staying by Commodus's side. However, that would mean Zhang Heng would need to obey Clint's order to stay alive, just like Pannonax.

And if Zhang Heng had kept the letters he received from Clint and chose not to hand them to Commodus, it meant he passed the first level. However, this was still not a good decision because Clint would definitely find a way to expose Zhang Heng to Altrus. If that happened, Zhang Heng would become Altrus' enemy because of these two letters.

It was undeniable that Clint's plan was almost perfect, but he did not expect Zhang Heng to burn the two letters in front of him.

"Didn't you say that the emperor is waiting anxiously to meet me? Better not let him wait too long." Zhang Heng stepped on the burning letters, killing off the last flames, and smiled.



...

Commodus had indeed waited for Zhang Heng for a long time, but he did not just sit there and do nothing. As the emperor of the empire, he ruled over a vast territory with a population of millions. This also meant something for Commodus to do, especially since he inherited the throne when he was still very young. Facing the huge political legacy left by Aurelius, not everyone wanted to assist the young emperor wholeheartedly.

This was also the reason why Commodus was so anxious to expand his manpower. When he returned to Rome, he found out the situation he faced here was no easier than when he fought the Germanic tribes at the River Rhine's bank.

Before Zhang Heng walked into Commodus's study, he heard the young emperor's roar in the corridor, "What did Dior promise me again?! He told me that the Senate would handle this matter, but is that how they handled it? They did not include me when they talked about rewarding the soldiers. After that, they told everyone that the Senate was the one rewarding those soldiers. What now?! My soldiers think that their emperor doesn't value them at all! My god! When I made peace with the Germanic, many senior officers in the military criticized me. And now the Senate has given them an excuse to slit my throat while I am asleep..."

Clint and Zhang Heng knew that Commodus was furious. Hence, they chose not to talk to him at this time. It was not until the conversation in the study was over that Clint reached out and knocked on the door.

They could hear Commodus's angry reply from inside. "Come in!"

Clint pushed the door, walked in with Zhang Heng, bowed, and said, "Your Majesty, Zhang Heng is here."

Commodus's mood improved a little after seeing Zhang Heng. He then squeezed out a smile and said, "Long time no see. You never fail to disappoint, don't you?"

When Zhang Heng stepped into the study, he took a quick glance at the entire room. To his surprise, Commodus was the only person there. In other words, if the emperor was sane and wasn't venting his anger at the air, it meant another person must've been in the room not too long ago. And that person had left the study only after Clint's knock on the door.

Did the person leave through the window?

Zhang Heng noticed that the study's windows were open, and the wind was blowing at the curtains. He, however, did not think that the individual had left through the windows since there was a small garden right outside. Before entering the study, Zhang Heng saw two gardeners cutting flowers and trees.

Since the other party chose to avoid them, he would not want the gardeners to spot him. Therefore, Zhang Heng deducted that there had to be a secret passage somewhere in this study. It allowed the second person in the room to come and go freely. Considering how cautious every emperor was, the person that talked to the emperor just now had obviously gained the emperor's full trust.

## **Chapter 858: New Task**

Clint was unsurprised by such a situation. He did not even look at other places after bringing Zhang Heng into the study room. All he did was step aside automatically.

“I have read the assessment report provided by Fabino. You did an excellent job in the southeast city. Although there are more foreigners in that place, they are also the people of the empire. They deserve the protection it offers. When my father was still in reign, I suggested that we do something about the southeast city, but at that time, the nobles at the Senate strongly opposed this idea. They said that this place has always been like this, and no one can change it. But now, you’ve proven them wrong. Very well. The empire has been following the rules for too long. We need some fresh blood to do the impossible.”

Commodus spoke about it passionately. The anger and depression caused by the betrayal of the Senate seemed to have blown away. He did not know why whenever he saw Zhang Heng, he would feel better. This was probably because the two had met several times when Commodus was in a bad mood.

“Given your outstanding performance, I want to appoint you as my adviser. Your job is to offer advice and suggestions to me. I wonder if you are willing to accept this job?” Commodus asked while staring at Zhang Heng with his piercing eyes.

And Zhang Heng did not disappoint him. He bowed and said, “If you need me, of course, I shall contribute my modest strength in any way possible. However, I am just an outsider. More than a month ago, I was just a gladiator in the arena, without a noble background.”

“I don’t care about a person’s background.” Commodus came over and patted Zhang Heng on the shoulder. “Don’t worry about this kind of thing. Look around you. Clint and Altrus are not from famous families either. They do have some royal blood flowing in them, but they are my distant cousins.”

Clint, on the other side, started to talk, “Yes, my family has fallen for a long time. By the time it reached our generation, we were no different from the ordinary. We all grew up in the city, and we eat like ordinary people. And we also wore what ordinary children would wear. If I didn’t get the chance to meet your majesty, I think I would be breaking my back in exchange for a meager income. At the same time, our ordinary background allows us to have a clearer picture of the bottom part of the world. That part of the world is something that the stubborn senators can’t see.”

“You heard what he said, right? I am not the kind of emperor who discriminates against anyone. And I don’t care what others think of you. Hence, you don’t have to worry about such a thing.” Commodus said, “Besides, I kept hearing the people in the town saying that you were a noble from the empire you came from, right?”

“That’s just a rumor, your majesty,” Zhang Heng said.

“One can say anything they want. However, it is hard for a person to fake his character, manners, and behavior. After getting to know you better, I believe those rumors about you are true.” Commodus returned to the table and signed his name on a piece of papyrus that was drafted a long time ago. After that, he tossed the papyrus to Zhang Heng. “This is your appointment letter. I welcome you to join us. From this moment on, you will be my consultant. You will be responsible for assisting me in handling various government affairs and offering advice and suggestions. I believe you are capable of handling this job.”

“Congratulations, brother. You just got the most tiring job in the world. Believe me, when you get really busy, you will miss the leisure time that you once had.” Clint, on the other side, smiled and congratulated Zhang Heng. At the same time, he clenched his fist secretly behind his back.

At this moment, Commodus’s temperament still remained unchanged. That was before he experienced the assassination that his sister planned. Not long after Aurelius’s death, Commodus did what he was supposed to do as an emperor under the influence and motivation of the responsibilities on his shoulder.

After appointing Zhang Heng as his consultant, he quickly changed topics and began to discuss his next task with Clint. At the same time, he did not ask Zhang Heng to leave the room. Clearly, he had already regarded the latter as his trusted consultant.

“I don’t know if you’ve heard of it. We were fooled by the Senate recently. When an emperor inherits the throne, he should give the soldiers gifts to gain their support. I just led them to fight a war that lasted for a few years, and I have just returned to Rome. And I can’t afford to disappoint them. However, the Senate told me that I shouldn’t worry about this matter. After all, I just inherited the throne, and there is much on my plate. The Senate said that they are willing to help me to choose the best gifts for them. In a way, they are trying to lessen my burden.”

“Yes, I also saw those notices on the road just now. It is saying that those gifts came from the Senate, but they did not mention your name, your majesty,” Clint said.

“Damn it! The senators tricked me! Now all my soldiers will think that their emperor doesn’t care about them. And the Senate is the only one that cares about them!” Commodus looked a little flustered.

“Did senior Dior do it?” Fortunately, Clint managed to keep his calm.

“I will go to the Senate and question him in person in the afternoon,” Commodus said, “anyway, it has already impacted us. And we need to fight back.”

“This is a battle of public opinion,” Clint said. “We need to let the people and the soldiers know who the ruler of this country is.”

“Altrus said the same.” Commodus nodded. “The matter of dealing with the Senate can be postponed, but the fight for public opinion cannot be delayed. Holding a gladiatorial show is just the beginning, and it is far from enough. How does it go with the new copper coin casting?”

“It’s going well. The first batch should be ready for use next month, with your avatar printed on them.”

“Very well, this matter will be your top priority. You are responsible for it. Make sure everything goes well. You’d better live nearby and keep an eye on those craftsmen.” Commodus paused and looked at Zhang Heng on the other side, “As for you, my friend from the East, I have another job for you. I have asked someone to cast a batch of bronze statues to send to the different parts of the city, but I heard that its progress is far from desirable. Can you go there to help me solve this problem?”

“Of course, I will make sure those bronze statues are delivered as scheduled,” Zhang Heng nodded.

“Great!” Commodus said, “After you join us, I should host a banquet to welcome you. However, we are now facing a critical situation. It seems that I can only make up for you after this matter is over. By that

time, I will summon all the consultants and introduce you to them. From now on, you are all colleagues. If you have any questions, you can communicate and help each other," Commodus said.

### **Chapter 859: Necklace**

Clint and Zhang Heng left Commodus's study room one after the other.

Zhang Heng walked down the stairs just like how he got to Commodus's study. He then heard a giggle nearby as he walked through the front courtyard garden.

When he stopped, he caught sight of Queen Christina and Commodus's sister, Lucilla, walking out from behind a garden of flowers, holding hands while chatting and laughing. When they saw Zhang Heng, the two women stopped. A playful twinkle appeared in Lucilla's eyes. "Oh, what a good day! We are fortunate enough to meet the gladiatorial champion here."

Queen Christina was impressed by Zhang Heng as well, but being more reserved than Lucilla, she merely gave Zhang Heng a few words of encouragement, planning to move on after that. But the next moment, Lucilla pulled Christina to her side. "Haven't you always complained to me about how boring it was to be living in the palace?"

"Yeah, Commodus is as diligent as his father. He is a good ruler. He has been worrying about all kinds of things. He is worried that his people will go hungry, he is worried that the soldiers fighting for the empire hadn't got enough rewards... So, he didn't spend much time with me after we got married." Although Christina tried to say good things about her husband, one could still hear a hint of resentment in her tone.

"Well, such are men. They care only about power and politics, which is why we women have to learn to have fun on our own," Lucilla chipped in.

"What kind of fun?" asked a puzzled Christina.

"We have the gladiatorial champion in front of us right now. Are you afraid that we won't get to have fun with him?" Lucilla's eyes moved from Zhang Heng's face to his chest.

"Sorry, but I am no longer a gladiator," Zhang Heng said.

"Yes, my brother gave you freedom, but I also heard that you just performed at the Victor Arena two weeks ago," Lucilla said casually.

"I have an agreement with Mark Reuss. In order to make up for his loss, I will perform once every month at the Victor Arena. If you want to watch my performance, I can give you two tickets for the next one. I believe the Victor Arena will be honored by both your presence," Zhang Heng replied with humility.

"Oh, how sweet of you! But what if we want to watch the performance now?" Lucilla had no intention of going down the steps. Instead, she stood up and walked half a step forward, drawing herself closer to Zhang Heng.

"Today? Not today, I still have work to do."

Zhang Heng's expression remained unchanged.

“What manner of work could be more important than performing for us?”

Lucilla wanted to move forward, but before Zhang Heng could speak, Christina, on the other side, rushed to reply, “My husband mentioned you to me more than once, and he wanted you to be his adviser. Have you gotten your appointment letter?”

“Yes, my queen.”

“Congratulations. It seems you really have something to do,” said Christina before she turned to Lucilla. “Commodus has arranged a task for him. It should be extremely important. We should let him go today.”

“Wow, you are really my brother’s good wife. How considerate!” Lucilla raised her eyebrows and gazed at Zhang Heng. “Well, since the queen has spoken for you, it would be insensitive of me to stop you from leaving. When you have completed your task, please don’t forget to look for us.”

As she spoke, Lucilla untied her necklace from her neck and threw it to Zhang Heng. “Here, in the previous gladiatorial show, I bet that you’d become the gladiatorial champion and make lots of money. I bet on you to win, and I made a handsome amount thanks to you. Consider this necklace your reward. If you encounter something that you cannot solve in the future, you can come to me with this necklace.”

Zhang Heng took the necklace that still lingered with Lucilla’s warmth. When he looked up again, Lucilla and Christina had already walked past him.

And Zhang Heng did not stay there any longer. He put the necklace away and left the palace.

...

After solving the problems in the southeast city, Zhang Heng came to Commodus as the emperor wished, and he was appointed his advisor. However, Zhang Heng did not get to meet his target. Altrus was more cautious than he thought. Earlier, Zhang Heng and Clint had heard Commodus yelling at someone and cursing the Senate. If he was right, that person should be Altrus.

But when Zhang Heng entered the room, Altrus had been long gone. Zhang Heng figured that there should be a secret passage in Commodus’s study that allowed Altrus to freely enter and exit the room. In other words, since Commodus gave Altrus so much liberty to enter and exit his study, it could only mean that Altrus had to be more than a mere consultant to the emperor.

One should know that the study room was a forbidden place for all men. Even Queen Christina herself wasn’t allowed to enter the study without Commodus’s consent. It was no wonder Clint felt threatened and wanted to recruit Zhang Heng to help to deal with Altrus. On the other hand, Balance Blade wanted Altrus dead as well.

Altrus had been around Commodus for many years, and he had done a lot for him in the light and the dark. And he had offended many people as well. Clearly, he knew that his life was in danger at most times, which was why he hid so well. His whereabouts were extremely secretive. Not even his subordinates knew where he was. It was not easy to find him.

For now, Zhang Heng had no idea how to look for him too. He could only continue investigating after he solved the bronze statue’s problem. Earlier, Commodus had also mentioned that he would hold a

welcoming banquet for Zhang Heng upon completing his given task. All of the emperor's advisors had also been invited to the dinner. Zhang Heng hoped that Altrus would be there as well.

The place where they cast the bronze statues was in the suburbs, far away from the city. Hence, Zhang Heng summoned a carriage to get him there.

After receiving the task, Zhang Heng did some research. Born in the Calradia family, the person responsible for this matter was named Decius.

Calradia was someone who had relied on his military merits to enter the Roman noble circles. Because of Aurelius, Decius' father was able to join the Senate. Hence, the Calradia family had always been a hardcore supporter of the royal family. If they weren't, Commodus wouldn't have put them in charge of casting the bronze statues.

However, the Decius, who Zhang Heng was going to meet next, was not an important figure in the Calradia family. Technically speaking, he was not even a royal family member, his mother being a maidservant. Besides, the Calradia family had grown so fast that its foundation and background were far from solid. In other words, Decius's status was just slightly higher than an ordinary civilian. This task was vital to him. Zhang Heng deduced that if Decius were sane, he would never sabotage this task.

#### **Chapter 860: Binota Mine**

While Zhang Heng was looking at Decius, Decius was also peeking at Zhang Heng.

He had read Zhang Heng's appointment letter and knew that the Asian man in front of him was the newly appointed consultant of Commodus. He made the trip here to investigate the reason why the construction of the bronze statue was delayed.

Decius wiped away the cold sweat confidently, proclaiming, "There is no problem with the craftsmen. We have already cast all the models. All we need to do next is to pour the molten bronze into the model. After that, we'll just need to wait for it to cool down before shattering the outer layer. Unfortunately, the Binota mine that has been supplying us with copper ore has recently encountered an accident. The mine tunnel collapsed, burying more than twenty slaves. The remaining slaves are still cleaning the mine tunnel. I don't know when they can resume their work. Without the ore, we can't proceed with our work."

"How about seeking another mine to supply you with the ore? Do you have a backup plan?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Yes, there are four mines at the outskirts of Rome. Binota is just a small one. We also have an agreement with another mine. If Binota can't supply us with enough copper ore, then the other mine will deliver theirs. But..." Decius stopped halfway.

"But what?"

"But recently, His Majesty, the Emperor, is casting a large number of new copper coins. Copper ore produced by other mines has been given orders to prioritize the coin minting. Hence, they do not have any extra copper ore to deliver to us," Decius said.

"What about the mines from other cities?"

“Coupled with the cost of transportation, the price of copper ore is nearly doubled. And it takes time to transport them over. I am afraid that we might not be able to meet the dateline.” Decius seemed very helpless. He wasn’t of pure blood and wasn’t allowed to inherit his father’s seat in the Senate. To ensure that he would not starve to death, his father had to pull many strings to get him this job. Initially, he thought that as long as he worked hard, Commodus would appreciate him and grant him a stable job in the future.

It was almost impossible to fail this task, but now it seemed like it was on the verge of falling apart. Decius was frustrated that he could do nothing about it. First, he did not ask for any kickback. Secondly, he had never treated his workers harshly. He had always been very cautious when carrying out his given tasks, but somehow, this time, he failed. Recently, it seemed his luck had taken a great dive.

However, Zhang Heng did not seem to agree with what he said. He then asked Decius after he heard that it would be inevitable that the delivery of the bronze statue would be delayed. “You said that there was an accident at the Binota mine. Did you see it with your own eyes?”

“Huh?” Decius was a little taken when he heard Zhang Heng’s question. “Do I really need to go there and assess the situation myself? According to the contract, if they fail to deliver the goods to us before the deadline, they will have to pay a fine.”

“How much?”

“Well, it’s about twenty Aureus per day. This is not a small amount. They have delayed the delivery for a couple of days, and I am afraid they’ll be earning no profit this time. If they drag it any longer, they will start losing a lot of money.”

“Twenty Aureus a day... even if the mine cannot afford it, there will be someone in this city that can,” Zhang Heng said casually. However, he did not go on about the battle between Commodus and the Senate. This wasnt something a nobody like Decius should know about.

“Do you know where Binota mine is? Let’s take a trip there together.”

“Now?” Decius felt terrible, “but it is not time yet to get off work.”

“Are you working now?”

“No... no,” Decius answered honestly.

“Then prepare the carriage,” Zhang Heng said.

“...”

Although Decius did not understand why Zhang Heng had to go to the mine, he still did his best to introduce the Binota mine and its owner to Zhang Heng. According to the information provided by Decius, Binota Mine’s owner was a powerful landlord named Cobb.

Hailing from a very ordinary background, he was just a powerless civilian. However, he fell in love with a girl named Mania, whose father was extremely wealthy. He owned a large field and two mines. Binota Mine happened to be one of them. Mania’s father despised Cobb and was always against his daughter from courting this pauper boy. However, the man died of illness before he could choose a son-in-law that he liked.

Afterward, Mania married Cobb as she wished. Since her father had no other children, Cobb became the new owner of this large field and two mines. Hence, he was also given the nickname Lucky Cobb.

"I have known Lucky Cobb for some time," Decius said. "I've bought a batch of grain for my family from him. He doesn't talk much, but he is pretty reliable. I don't think he will lie to me about the mine accidents. Besides, he won't gain anything from lying."

Zhang Heng was noncommittal when he heard what Decius said. Instead, he kept asking.

"Then, do you know who he usually interacts with? And who is his biggest customer?"

"Well, Cobb spends most of his time patrolling the farmland or wandering around the two mines. Although he is not a bad person, he is not the kind who likes to make friends. As for his biggest customer, I heard that he sold all the wheat he cultivated to the senator, Divo Braille. More than half of the grain shops in Rome are run by Divo Braille."

"Who?"

"Divo Braille. Know who he is?"

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows. He did not expect to hear about someone he knew here. Divo Braille was the one that the Jewish Gang and the Golden Crown had asked him to deal with. Zhang Heng promised that he would get rid of him in exchange for the patrol team's growth in the southeast city. The three major forces in the southeast city even helped him to pass the assessment perfectly.

However, Zhang Heng couldn't be certain for now if this incident was related to Divo Braille. And if it was, how deep was Divo Braille involved in this? Zhang Heng's intuition told him that he might be able to take advantage of this incident to bring Divo Braille down.

On the other side, Decius looked like he was envious of Zhang Heng. He now treated Zhang Heng as his idol. He was born as a gladiator, but he had managed to climb his way to becoming a consultant. And he seemed to have quickly gotten to know a large number of powerful men in a short time after entering the political world. Although Divo Braille was not as influential as Dior in the Senate, one should not underestimate him.

Moreover, the cunning Divo Braille would choose not to choose a side unless it was his last resort. Hence, he did not offend too many people in the political playground. As a result, he ended up having many allies and friends in the Senate.

Decius was thinking about getting Zhang Heng to introduce him to Divo Braille as a backup plan after he was done with this job. He did not want to end up a plebian.

But before he could talk to Zhang Heng, the carriage had already driven out of the path in the woods, and their destination lay before them.